School Reform News

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When Schools Compete, Good Things Happen

by Robert Holland

Numerous studies in recent years have shown student achievement and parental satisfaction improve when families use vouchers to choose private schooling. But a nagging question has lingered: What is the effect of voucher programs on students who remain in the public schools?

Governor Jeb Bush

Now comes an answer: The effect is good—and the more directly public schools are affected by competition from vouchers, the better.

That conclusion comes from a Manhattan Institute study of Florida's A+ Program, Governor Jeb Bush's signature education reform. Since

FLORIDA continued on page 4

Most Americans Would Choose Private Schools

by George A. Clowes

A new Gallup poll conducted for Phi Delta Kappa International, whose education surveys command high respect in the teaching profession, reveals a compelling motivation for the fierce opposition teacher union leaders and most public school officials show toward school vouchers: Most students wouldn't attend public schools if they had a voucher.

Only about one in three Americans (35 percent) would send their children to public schools if offered a voucher that would cover the full cost of tuition at a religious

POLL continued on page 6

MATCH School Shows Poverty Isn't Destiny

by George A. Clowes

It is the most urgent problem in U.S. public education today, but few people have the stomach to take on its challenge. It demands a daunting amount of effort and offers low odds of success: How can high-poverty students entering high school with only fifth- or sixth-grade skills be prepared to graduate as proficient 12th-graders four years later?

The MATCH School in Boston—the Media and Technology Charter High School—not only takes on that challenge

MATCH continued on page 12

Congress Practices One Thing, Preaches Another on School Choice

Getty

Representative Tom Davis (R-Virginia) authored the D.C. Parental Choice Incentive Act, which has been incorporated into the District of Columbia appropriations bill. The House of Representatives approved the appropriations measure, with the voucher plan intact, on September 9.

by Krista Kafer

Over the past three years Congress has had several opportunities to approve legislation that would give low-income families the opportunity to choose where their children attend school. In every case, had lawmakers whose own children were enrolled in private schools voted with school choice advocates to give disadvantaged families the same access, the legislation would have passed.

According to the most recent Heritage Foundation survey, 42 percent of Members of Congress responded they send or have sent at least one child to a private school. In the general population, only about 10 percent of students attend private schools. Heritage Foundation surveys of Congress conducted in 2001 and 2000 yielded similar results.

Of those responding, the percentage of Members of Congress who send their children to private schools is disproportionate to that of the general population:

- While only 10 percent of U.S. students attend private schools, 41 percent of Representatives and 46 percent of Senators responded that they had sent children to private school;
- 45 percent of House Ways and Means Committee members and 31 percent of House Education and the Workforce Committee members exercised private school choice;
- 56 percent of Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and 47 percent of Senate Finance Committee members exercised private school choice; and

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Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

by Joseph L. Bast & Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.

At its root, the campaign for parental choice in education is about relying on *capitalism* to educate our children. Opponents demonize parental choice in education by tapping the public's confusion about competition, profits, and prices. The anti-choice campaign is really a thinly veiled anti-capitalism campaign. To counter this, we must educate millions of Americans about what capitalism is, how it works, and why it should be trusted in education.

Joseph Bast and Herb Walberg, president and chairman, respectively, of The Heartland Institute, make the case for parental choice in education by explaining and defending capitalism. *Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!* is the first effort to join these two subjects in one book since Milton Friedman proposed vouchers in *Capitalism and Freedom* in 1962.

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Congress Returns to Tackle DC Vouchers, Other Thorny Votes

by Don Soifer

As August recess dwindled away and Capitol Hill repopulated, Members and staff were abruptly reminded they had left town with many of the year's thorniest education votes still before them.

No vote loomed more conspicuously than the question of President George W. Bush's proposed school voucher plan for Washington, DC. The DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act would offer low-income parents up to $7,500 per child to select a school of choice for their children. Mayor Anthony Williams and other District leaders who helped design the plan have maintained a strong Hill presence supporting it. On September 9, the House narrowly approved the measure with a 209-208 vote, moving the plan to the Senate, where most observers were expecting an extremely tight outcome.

While Members spent the recess traveling abroad, raising money at home, meeting with constituents, and reacquainting themselves with their families, the Capitol's halls and telephone lines were kept buzzing by supporters and opponents of school choice weighing in on the measure. Even if approved this year, the program would be a five-year pilot requiring annual appropriations, so the debate is likely to be replayed annually.

www.ed.gov

Education Secretary Rod Paige helps a student with her fractions during his visit to West Oak Lane charter school in Philadelphia on May 21, 2003.

Support for Charters Boosted

"There is no force in the universe more powerful, as far as school change is concerned, than an informed parent with options," Secretary of Education Rod Paige commented earlier this summer. The occasion of his remarks was not the DC voucher plan he strongly supports, but the announcement of new federal grants for charter schools. The Secretary commented on the value of charters, especially where public schools have been labeled "in need of improvement" under the new terms of the No Child Left Behind Act.

"The demand for high-quality education is everywhere and charter schools can meet that demand in unprecedented ways," said Paige.

In August, the Department of Education (DoEd) announced more than $21 million in new state charter school grants for eight states: Alaska, Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.

Currently DoEd supports nearly one in three of the nation's more than 3,000 charter schools in 39 states. That support includes not only charter school operations, but planning and setup as well.

Bush's FY 2004 budget proposes $320 million for charter schools, including $120 million for credit enhancement. Many charter school leaders have pointed to the need for safe and functional facilities as the greatest barrier to charter school growth.

> **"There is no force in the universe more powerful, as far as school change is concerned, than an informed parent with options."**
>
> ROD PAIGE, SECRETARY
> U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Also this summer, DoEd officials awarded a $1.8 million grant to the Milken Family Foundation to expand its Teacher Advancement Program. The program is designed to attract, retain, and motivate talented people for the teaching profession. Teachers who qualify can earn stipends and performance awards and also professional advancement, much as do professionals in other careers. They are given exposure to innovative teaching strategies while being held accountable for their performance. The federal grant will be focused on schools in Arizona, Arkansas, and South Carolina.

Senate Prepares for Special Ed Vote

In September, the Senate moved closer to a floor vote on the bipartisan special education bill passed by the Education Committee in late June. The Senate version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) differs from the version passed by the House in a number of significant ways.

The bills share common goals, including improving education results for disabled students, reducing mislabeling of non-disabled students, reducing paperwork burdens on teachers, and improving discipline procedures widely considered problematic. But because they adopt different approaches to solving these problems, the business of resolving the two plans will fall to a conference committee, as it did with the No Child Left Behind Act. Both bodies will need to approve the final bill.

One prominent difference with regard to the misidentification of children concerns the widespread use of IQ-discrepancy models to evaluate whether children are disabled. While the House version would prohibit schools from relying on "any single measure or assessment as the sole criterion" for labeling a child, the Senate version simply would clarify that schools are not limited to the IQ-discrepancy test.

The House version also granted school districts significant flexibility to use up to 15 percent of IDEA funds for correcting reading deficiencies before children are—sometimes incorrectly—identified as disabled. The Senate version rejected that approach.

The Senate bill was endorsed by a number of high-profile groups from the education establishment—including the National Education Association, National School Boards Association, American Federation of Teachers, and Council for Exceptional Children—which opposed the House plan.

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Virginia.

Correction — In the map of the United States on page 2 of the September issue of *School Reform News*, the state of Wyoming is misidentified as the state of Colorado. *School Reform News* regrets the error.

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Florida

Continued from page 1

the 1998-99 school year, Florida has used its high-stakes assessment test, FCAT, to grade schools from A to F. When any school receives two Fs in a four-year period, its students become eligible for vouchers they can use to transfer to private schools or other public schools.

Incentive to Improve?

To test the A+ rationale that vouchers give failing schools an incentive to improve, Manhattan scholars Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters organized schools into five categories according to the imminence of voucher competition each faces:

- "Voucher eligible" schools, where students already are receiving vouchers;
- "Voucher threatened" schools, where one more F will make them voucher-eligible;
- "Always D" schools—low-performing schools with lots of Ds on their report cards, but which have never faced an immediate threat from vouchers;
- "Ever D" schools—low-performing schools with just one D on their report cards; and
- "Formerly threatened" schools, which used to be voucher-threatened but no longer are.

To address any concern that schools might be devising ways to "beat" FCAT without producing gains in real learning, the scholars also checked scores on the Stanford-9, a nationally respected norm-referenced test.

The results showed a remarkably consistent pattern when test scores for each group of schools were compared to the performance of the rest of Florida's public schools: The more the schools faced competition for students and funds spurred by vouchers, the greater the gains on the FCAT and Stanford-9 from 2001-02 to 2002-03.

Schools already voucher-eligible made the biggest improvements—up 10.1 scale score points on FCAT reading, 9.3 scale points on FCAT math, and 5.1 percentile points on the Stanford-9.

Schools immediately threatened by vouchers made the second-greatest gains—up 8.2 points on FCAT reading, 6.7 points on FCAT math, and 3 percentile points on the Stanford-9.

Schools that have never received anything but Ds for four years, or those that have received at least one D since FCAT grading began, scored slight or statistically insignificant gains, respectively. These are low-performing schools, but any threat of losing students to vouchers is two years or more down the road.

Finally, the formerly threatened schools—those that received an F in 1998-99 but not since—actually reported declining test scores. The F is a distant memory, and because a new four-year period has begun, any threat of competition is remote.

"When we give parents the ability to make choices about their children's education, we give underachieving schools the incentive they need to change and improve."

JOHN BOEHNER (R-OHIO), CHAIRMAN HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Stigma Alone Not Enough

Critics of earlier Manhattan research on the competitive effects of vouchers argued that the stigma of a failing grade, not the incentives created by vouchers, motivated schools to improve. However, the relatively poor performance of schools that have the stigma of past failure but are no longer subject to a voucher threat undermines that alternative explanation, Greene and Winters contended.

"It is implausible that the stigma effect only exists for three years and then suddenly disappears," they wrote. "The more believable explanation is that the actuality or prospect of voucher competition provides incentives for schools to improve and this effect suddenly disappears when the four year voucher threat period expires."

The voucher-eligible and voucher-threatened schools' across-the-board gains on both the FCAT and Stanford-9 math tests also undercut arguments that schools simply "teach to" or manipulate high-stakes tests like FCAT.

"If schools facing voucher competition were only appearing to improve by somehow manipulating the Florida high-stakes testing system," the Manhattan scholars observed, "we would not have seen a corresponding improvement on another test that no one had incentives to manipulate."

The study also considered the possibility that results were shaped by what statisticians call a "regression to the mean," which roughly translates to "when you're at the bottom rung, there's no way to go but up." If that explanation applied, however, there should be little or no difference between the voucher-eligible/voucher-threatened schools and those that have similarly low performance but do not face a voucher threat. Voucher competition seems to have driven which schools improved and which did not.

"Skimming the Dregs"?

Finally, critics may argue scores are rising in the voucher-affected schools because the worst students are using their vouchers to depart for private schools. That would fly in the face of voucher foes' arguments that vouchers "cream" the best students from public schools. Although the study unearthed no evidence this is happening, it would mean vouchers were "dredging" the worst students from public schools. In other words, vouchers would be serving the students most in need and relieving public schools of that burden.

The Manhattan study could make an impact on the debate in Congress over whether to fund a pilot voucher program to help 2,000 children from the educationally distressed District of Columbia public school system. House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio), who is cosponsoring DC vouchers with House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-Virginia), said the Manhattan paper confirms "that school choice strengthens public education in America.

"When we give parents the ability to make choices about their children's education, we give underachieving schools the incentive they need to change and improve," Boehner noted. "Money alone is not the magic cure for what's ailing public education."

Given the Florida demonstration of the impact vouchers have on a variety of schools, columnist Linda Seebach of the *Rocky Mountain News* may have raised the most intriguing question:

"If just a little competition accomplishes so much, what would a lot of competition do?"

Robert Holland is a senior fellow with the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is **holland@lexingtoninstitute.org**.

INTERNET INFO

A copy of the Manhattan Institute study, "When Schools Compete: The Effects of Vouchers on Florida Public School Achievement," is available online at **http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_02.htm**.

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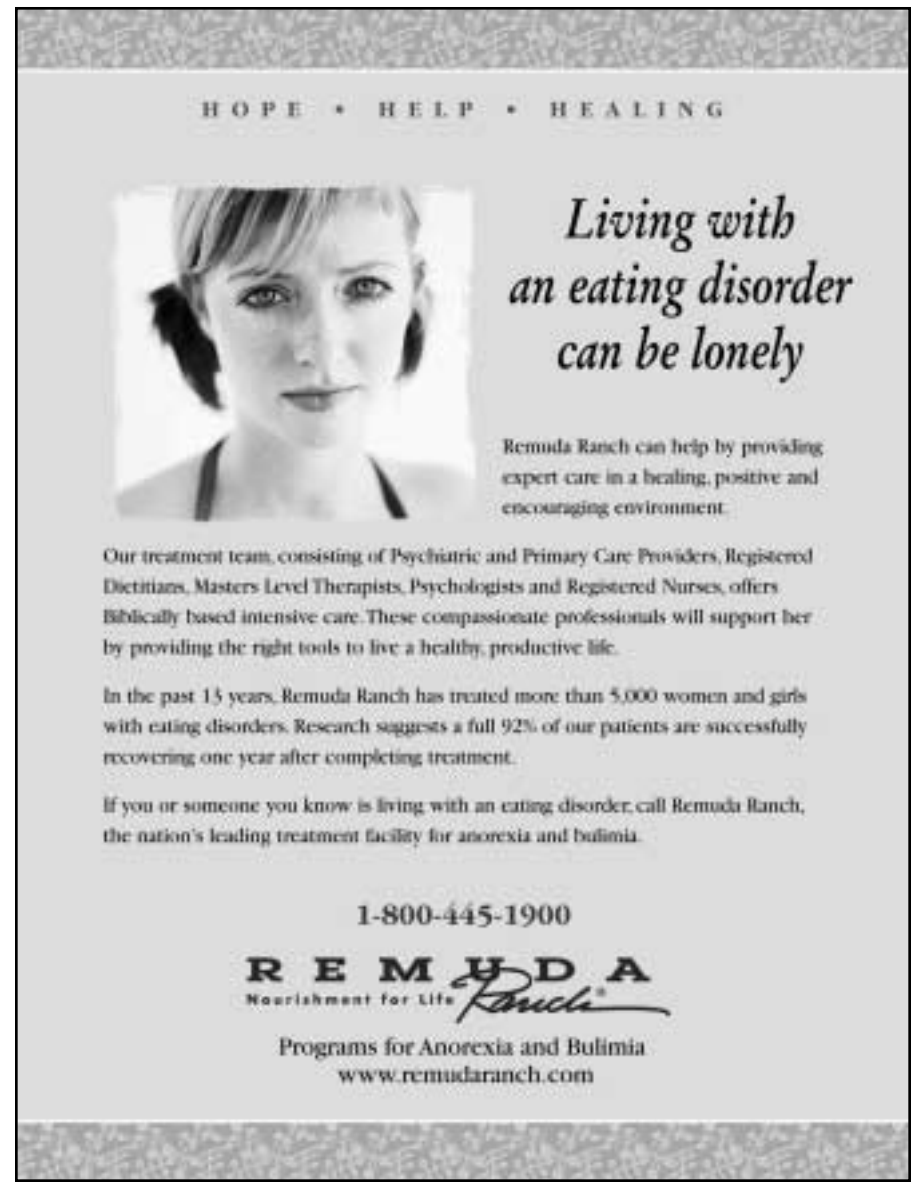
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Business Group Gives Chicago Schools an F

by George A. Clowes

Neither increased funding nor administrative changes will produce the significant gains in student performance that are necessary for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to come even close to meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, concludes a new report from an influential Chicago business group.

The group's recommended treatment for spurring the "radically dysfunctional" school system to better serve the city's children is competition from schools operating outside the existing system—i.e., voucher schools and charter schools.

"Chicago's public school system is structured for failure. It needs to be fixed," declares the July 2003 report, called *Left Behind: Student Achievement in Chicago's Public Schools*.

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, who was given control of the city's schools eight years ago, reacted angrily to the report, even though it praised his efforts and the efforts, talent, and dedication of the school board and current Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan. The report's criticism is directed at the system, not at individuals.

"The problem lies in the system, which lacks competitive pressures pushing it to achieve desired results," the report explains. "It responds more to politics and pressures from the school unions than to community or parental demands for quality. Schools, principals, and teachers are largely insulated from accountability or responsibility for results."

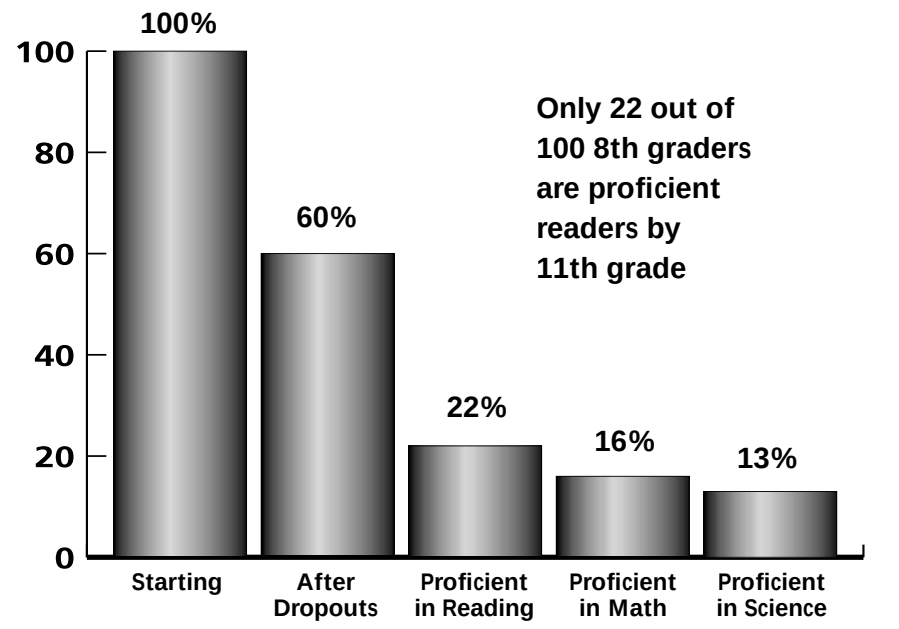
According to the report's authors, what CPS desperately needs in order to make fundamental improvements is "increasingly large doses of parental choice ... competitive alternatives that would give parents the right to vote with their feet." That means a voucher system or, as the report recommends, dramatically expanding the number of charter schools in the city. Without such reforms, the report warns, any additional funds channeled into the system "would be money largely wasted."

The report was produced by the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, a group of about 75 senior executives from the Chicago area's leading corporations, professional firms, and universities. The Commercial Club's mission is "to improve the economic and social well-being of the Chicago region."

The Commercial Club is chaired by Northern Trust Chairman and CEO William A. Osborn. President of the Commercial Club's Civic Committee is Chicago United Way Chairman R. Eden Martin, a partner in the law firm of Sidley Austin Brown & Wood. The Civic Committee's education panel, which produced the report, is headed by John Rowe, chairman and CEO of the Chicago-based utility Exelon Corp.

"The Civic Committee report recommends that at least 100 new charter or contract schools should be created primarily to serve students and families living in Chicago's inner city," said Martin.

FEW STUDENTS MEET SUCCESS IN CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS



No Alternative Public Schools

The report's conclusion about the failure of the city's educational system was backed up just a month after its publication by the latest application of federal NCLB standards to Chicago's public schools. Sixty-one percent of the city's schools failed to make adequate progress in student achievement last year. As a result, more than a quarter of a million students were eligible to transfer to better schools. However, public school officials made only 1,035 seats available for student transfers, leaving the vast majority of eligible students with no alternative but to stay in their existing schools.

As the Civic Committee report points out, when middle- or upper-income families in Chicago need an alternative school, they send their children to private schools, or they move to a suburb with high-quality public schools. In fact, a recent study by the *Chicago Sun-Times* showed parents pulled almost one-third (31 percent) of the city's public elementary school students out of the system over the past eight years, taking them to private schools or to the suburbs.

"However, most low-income, minority families who live in Chicago—particularly in Chicago's inner-city neighborhoods—do not have this option," the Civic Committee report points out. "They have no choice but to send their children to public schools in their neighborhoods. And, today, the educational achievement levels of students who attend these schools are far too often abysmally low."

Abysmal Achievement Levels

The bulk of the Civic Committee's report details just how abysmal those achievement levels are, not only for students in inner-city schools but also for students in the system as a whole. The low level of the 2002 test scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) shows the "extraordinarily long way" Chicago's public schools have to go simply to come close to meeting the NCLB expectation for

"Sixty-one percent of the city's schools failed to make adequate progress in student achievement last year. As a result, more than a quarter of a million students were eligible to transfer to better schools."

2014: that 100 percent of students will meet state standards in reading and math.

Without fundamental improvements to the city's schools, the report warns, "generations of Chicago's children will proceed through a school system that continues to produce appallingly high levels of dropouts and students who fail to meet state academic standards."

For example, 40 percent of CPS high school students entering from the 8th grade have dropped out by 11th grade. Another 10 percent drop out before graduation, leading to an on-time graduation rate of less than 50 percent. For those who remain in school at 11th grade, the percentage who meet or exceed state standards is as follows for 2002:

- 36 percent in reading (22 percent of 8th grade cohort);
- 26 percent in math (16 percent of 8th grade cohort);
- 22 percent in science (13 percent of 8th grade cohort).

In other words, two-thirds (64 percent) of CPS 11th-graders do not meet state reading standards, and the 36 percent who do meet those reading standards represent less than a quarter (22 percent) of the 8th-grade class that entered high school three years earlier.

The percentage of 11th-graders in high-poverty schools who meet or exceed state standards is even lower:

- 24 percent in reading;
- 13 percent in math;
- 10 percent in science.

In other words, three-quarters (76 percent) of CPS 11th-graders in high-poverty schools do not meet state reading standards.

Despite the mayor's reform efforts, recent test score trends cited in the report give little encouragement of future improvement. Test score data for elementary and high school show no significant progress in reading scores, and there is none at the 11th-grade level. The 2003 ISAT results are even less encouraging, with a significant drop in the percentage of 8th-graders meeting or exceeding state standards.

Teachers Are "Essentially Unmanaged"

The report's authors recognize that good teachers make the most important single contribution to a child's success or failure in school. However, they point out CPS teachers are "essentially unmanaged" because of defects in two key personnel management areas: teacher deployment and teacher evaluation.

Although the best teachers are most needed in the worst-performing schools, that's not where they're deployed in Chicago, according to the report. In fact, the worst-performing schools—i.e., those in inner-city Chicago with high concentrations of low-income students—are those most likely to have teachers who are not "highly qualified"—i.e., teachers who are not fully certified, or those operating with emergency or provisional licenses.

Teacher evaluation in CPS also is ineffective, according to the Civic Committee report. Despite the fact that most students in Chicago's public schools do not complete their schooling on time and most of those headed for graduation cannot meet state standards, only about two out of every thousand CPS teachers are rated as "inadequate." To the report's authors, it appears as if "the entire collective bargaining apparatus has been designed less to improve teaching or student learning than to protect the interests of teachers."

What is needed to transform the system is not better administration but competition, the Education Committee concludes. "Competition—which is the engine of American productivity generally—is the key to improved performance of our public schools."

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

INTERNET INFO

A copy of the Civic Committee's July 2003 report, "Left Behind: Student Achievement in Chicago's Public Schools," may be obtained from the Web site of the Commercial Club of Chicago at **http://www.commercialclubchicago.org/civiccommittee/initiatives/education/LEFT_BEHIND.pdf**

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Poll

Continued from page 1

or secular private school, according to the new PDK poll. Even if the voucher covered only half the cost of tuition, a majority of Americans still would choose a private school (51 percent) over a public school (47 percent) for their children.

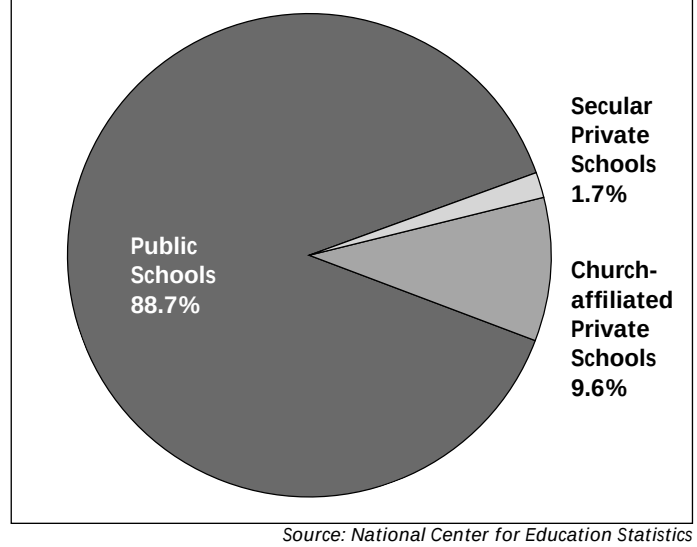
Among parents with children in public schools, 59 percent would choose a private school if given a full-tuition voucher, while only 39 percent would choose a public school. This is a remarkably high percentage in favor of private schooling, since 68 percent of those same public school parents give an A or B grade to the public school their oldest child attends. The percentage of public school parents who would choose a private school drops to 44 percent if only a half-tuition voucher were offered, with 55 percent opting for a public school.

Although the Democratic Party is firmly opposed to school vouchers, fewer than half of Democrats polled (45 percent) would select a public school if given a full-tuition voucher. Only 28 percent of Republicans would choose a public school if given a full-tuition voucher.

Losing Faith in Public Schools

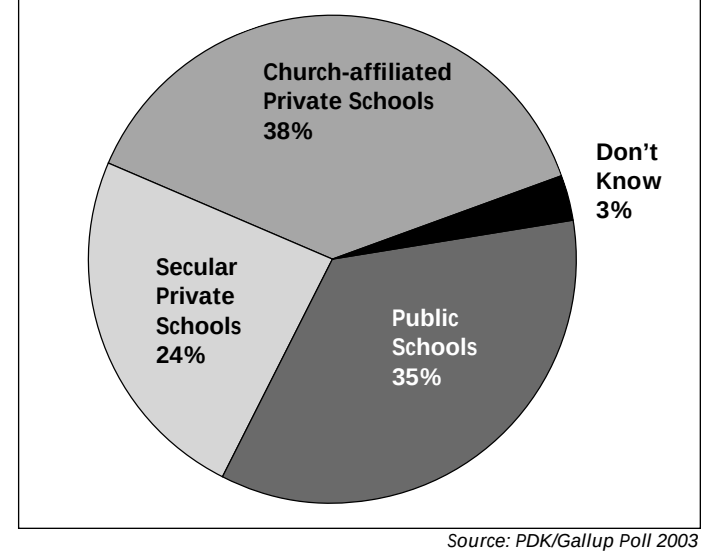
These dramatic findings, which demonstrate great public demand for a wider array of choices in K-12 education, are reported—though not highlighted—in "The 35th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Towards the Public Schools" by Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup. The report is published in the September 2003 issue of *Kappan*.

Current Enrollment with Public Schools Free and Private Schools Costing Extra



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Enrollment Preferences With Full Tuition Vouchers at Private Schools



Source: PDK/Gallup Poll 2003

Based on school preference data, parents' high regard for public schools seems to have dropped markedly in recent years. The percentage of public school parents in 2003 who would choose to keep their children in public schools when offered full-tuition vouchers —39 percent—is significantly lower than the figure reported four years ago—56 percent—in a 1999 PDK/Gallup survey that also probed the preferences of public school parents when offered a choice of schools with tuition paid by the government.

Opponents of school choice claim vouchers would harm students whose parents opted to leave them in public schools, but the American public doesn't share that pessimistic view, according to the poll. Only 12 percent of respondents thought the academic achievement of students remaining in the public schools would get worse; 26 percent thought it would get better, and 59 percent thought it would stay the same.

When asked if they thought vouchers for private schools would or would not improve student achievement in their community, respondents were evenly split, with 48 percent saying vouchers would improve student achievement and 48 percent saying they would not. PDK/Gallup reports this essentially neutral finding as "48 percent saying [achievement] would get worse," even though respondents in fact were not asked if they thought vouchers would make student achievement in the community "get worse," only if student achievement would or would not improve.

Gallup polled 1,011 adults aged 18 and older between May 28 and June 18, 2003.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The full text of "The 35th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools," by Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, is available online at **http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0309pol.pdf.**

Access to reports on the 2003 and earlier polls is available from the Web site of Phi Delta Kappa International at **http://www.pdkintl.org**.

Paradoxical Ruling Appealed to Washington Supreme Court

by George A. Clowes

What if you had the right to assume people who refused to join your organization nevertheless wanted to support your political agenda? What if you also had the right to deduct money for your political agenda directly from the paychecks of those non-members?

This "what if" scenario is no pipe dream for the Washington Education Association (WEA). On June 24, a Washington Appeals Court panel ruled 2-1 that the WEA had those rights, and that a state law designed to protect the free speech of teachers violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The state attorney general has called on the state supreme court to review the decision.

The law in question made it illegal for the WEA to deduct money intended for political purposes from the paychecks of non-member teachers without the permission of those teachers. Paradoxically, the Appeals Court ruled this law—intended to protect the First Amendment rights of teachers—violates the First Amendment because it is "unduly burdensome" for the teacher union to comply.

"Forcing nonmembers to contribute money to a labor union amounts to compelled association with the union and impacts their First Amendment free speech and association rights," declared the Appeals Court. "Nevertheless, the State's interest in facilitating collective bargaining and preventing free ridership justifies the compelled association," it concluded.

The Appeals Court ruling reverses the effect of a campaign finance initiative, I-134, that was approved by 72 percent of the state's voters in 1992. The initiative stopped union officials from deducting funds for political activities from the paycheck of a teacher who was not a union member without explicit, affirmative authorization from the teacher.

Teachers who decide not to join the WEA, often for political or ideological reasons, become "agency fee payers" and must pay the regular WEA member dues of more than $700 per year. The free speech rights of those non-member teachers were protected by state law RCW 42.17.760, which states:

"A labor organization may not use agency shop fees paid by an individual who is not a member of the organization to make contributions or expenditures to influence an election or to operate a political committee, unless affirmatively authorized by the individual."

That procedural requirement, according to the Appeals Court, is unconstitutional. "By requiring an 'opt-in' procedure, [the law] presumes that non-members object to the use of their fees for political purposes," stated the court.

In July, the state's Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) unanimously voted to appeal the ruling to the state supreme court, and Attorney General Christine Gregoire filed a motion with the state supreme court to appeal the decision. More than 500 citizens contacted Gregoire and PDC within days of the unexpected ruling, asking them to actively pursue the case.

"We hope the State Supreme Court will uphold our nation's constitution and the free speech rights of teachers by overturning the outrageous ruling from the Court of Appeals," said Bob Williams, president of the Washington-based Evergreen Freedom Foundation (EFF).

EFF filed the original complaint against the WEA that prompted the attorney general to sue the union for violating the law. The case was on appeal after the court found the WEA guilty of five years of violations, with the union agreeing even before the trial that it had "committed multiple violations" of the law. For willful violation of the law, the WEA was ordered to pay $590,000 in fines and state legal costs, and it has since been required to return about $300,000 to teachers. (See "WA Teacher Union Found Guilty," *School Reform News*, October 2001.)

In 1997, the WEA had settled another case related to the same law for $430,000. (See "Washington Teachers' Union Faces Lawsuit," *School Reform News*, April 1997.)

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INTERNET INFO

A short background document on the case, "PDC v. WEA," prepared by the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, is available online at **http://www.effwa.org/pdfs/pdc_wea.pdf**.

The attorney general's petition for review of the Appeals Court ruling is available online at **http://www.effwa.org/weavspdc.html**.

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Philadelphia's Privatization Experiment Produces Gains

Student achievement is up, Vallas adds partners, Edison restructures

by Lisa Snell

One year after the nation's largest school privatization experiment began in Philadelphia, the competition between restructured city schools, privately managed schools, and charter schools has led to significant gains in student achievement for Philadelphia students.

Remarkably, the 21 schools overhauled and given extra support by the Philadelphia school district outscored both charter schools and those operated by private managers—including Edison—on state reading and math tests.

The restructured schools reduced the number of students scoring below basic levels by 15 percentage points in math and 11.3 in reading. Edison's 20 schools, by comparison, barely changed the percentage of students in that category in math and did slightly worse in reading.

Of 17 Edison schools with fifth grades, reading scores improved in 13 and math scores in 14. Of the 12 with eighth grades, five improved both reading and math scores, while seven saw scores drop. Edison has a history of slower achievement growth during the first academic year, and Philadelphia has been a particularly hostile environment for the company to attempt reform efforts. Edison must show significant student performance growth in the 2003-2004 school year in order to retain the Philadelphia contract.

There was less resistance to change in the restructured schools because most teachers and principals saw the reform efforts as staving off privatization.

Edison Goes Private

In June Edison announced plans to take the company private. Edison has signed a merger agreement with a new company formed by its own management team and an equity firm, Liberty Partners. Essentially, "going private" means a company's shares are no longer publicly traded on the stock market, but instead are purchased and held privately by a small number of owners. The acquisition is expected to be completed in Fall 2003 and is subject to the approval of the company's stockholders.

The change is part of Edison's plan to maintain a lower profile while diversifying into a wider range of education services including after-school care, summer school, school tutoring, and student assessment and benchmarking services.

Adding Partnerships

Philadelphia Schools Chief Paul Vallas has shifted his school partnership strategy to rely on more universities and nonprofit organizations to help fix Philadelphia schools. Six universities, a museum, and William Bennett's for-profit K12 have joined the list of outside groups hired to run pieces of the nation's seventh-largest public school district.

The district's eight new partners will offer a range of services at 16 city schools—including teacher certification courses, tutoring, and mentoring programs—and help develop the district's curriculum. The new agreements would leave schools in the city's control.

Some examples of the new Philadelphia partnerships include:

- Drexel University has offered to act as a consultant for the district on matters related to school design, information technology, and business management. It will send more than 2,000 of its own students into city schools to perform volunteer work.
- Eastern University wants to install a program at a city high school that would integrate university-level courses into the regular curriculum, allowing students to earn up to two years of college credit by the time they graduate.
- K12 is developing a Web-based teaching program for a new city elementary school scheduled to open in 2004.
- Philadelphia's science museum, The Franklin Institute, and one of its pharmacology and health sciences colleges, The University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, have agreed to help the district open and operate a pair of new science-themed high schools.
- Lock Haven University will create a mentoring, certification, and master's degree program for new teachers at a city elementary school.

"[T]he competition between restructured city schools, privately managed schools, and charter schools has led to significant gains in student achievement for Philadelphia students."

Vallas said the partnership agreements would cost about $3 million. He plans to announce several more partnerships with private groups in the coming weeks.

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is **lsnell@reason.org**.

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Charter Schools Fuel School Management Growth

by Lisa Snell

While large-scale privatization efforts like the Philadelphia experiment may be politically difficult, nationwide the growth of charter schools continues to fuel the growth of both for-profit and nonprofit education service providers.

Charter schools can be viewed as the largest example of education outsourcing, with close to 2,700 individual contracts between charter schools and their government authorizers.

According to "Profiles of For-Profit Education Management Companies, Fifth Annual Report, 2002-2003," more than 74 percent of all privately managed public schools were charter schools. For-profit providers operate between 10 and 14 percent of all charter schools. In 2002-2003, 47 companies operated 417 schools in 24 states and the District of Columbia.

As more failing schools are driven by the No Child Left Behind Act to seek new management arrangements through charter schools or contract management, the number of for-profit and nonprofit managers will likely continue to increase.

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INTERNET INFO

The report by Alex Molnar, Glen Wilson, and Daniel Allen, "Profiles of For-Profit Education Management Companies, Fifth Annual Report, 2002-2003," is available online at the Web site of the Commercialism in Education Research Unit at Arizona State University, **http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPSL-0301-102-CERU.pdf**.

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Administrators Stonewall NCLB in Colorado

Parents improperly notified, discouraged from exercising rights

by Pamela Benigno

Public school districts across the state of Colorado broke the law last year, failing to properly notify parents of essential information about a new federal law. Thousands more parents received letters from administrators trying to discourage parents from exercising their rights under the new law.

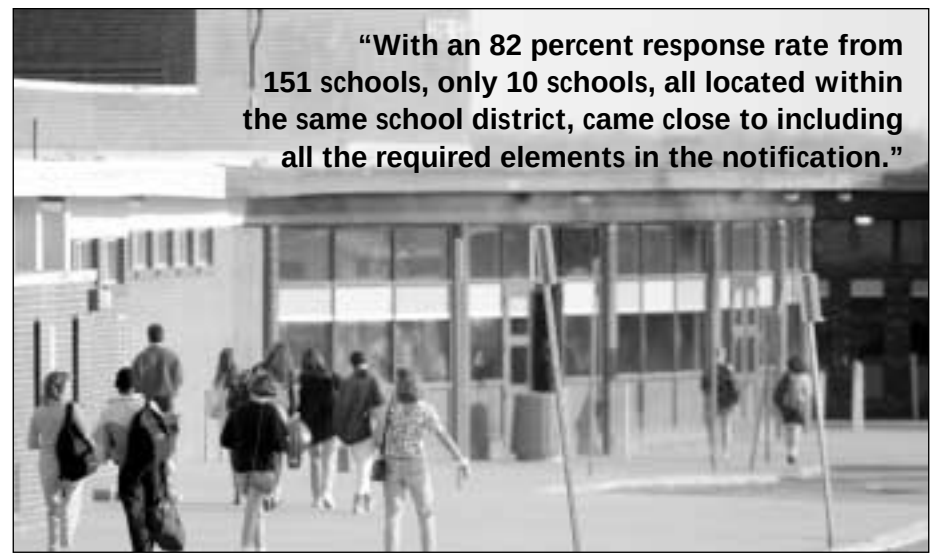
Low student achievement in 151 Colorado public schools placed the schools on School Improvement or Corrective Action status in 2002. School administrators are required by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act to notify parents about what this status means and about the new parental right to transfer their children to a higher-performing school with transportation provided for by the district.

The law also requires the notification to include:

- the reason for the school's placement on the School Improvement or Corrective Action list;
- how the school compares academically to other schools;
- what the school, the district, and the state are doing to address the low achievement; and
- how parents can become involved in addressing academic issues at the school.

Informing Parents

The Education Policy Center at the Independence Institute, a think tank in Golden, Colorado, examined the forms of notification provided to parents to discover if in fact school administrators had fulfilled the requirements of the law and if they had lived up to the spirit of the law.



"With an 82 percent response rate from 151 schools, only 10 schools, all located within the same school district, came close to including all the required elements in the notification."

The Center asked the 151 schools identified for School Improvement or Corrective Action to provide a copy of the letter or other format used to communicate with parents about their choice options in the first year of the mandate. The request was accompanied by a survey to gather additional information. The survey and a summary of responses are reprinted in the June 2003 Independence Institute Issue Paper, "No Child Left Behind Mandates School Choice: Colorado's First Year."

The samples of notification collected for the purpose of the study, as well as the responses to the surveys, were revealing.

With an 82 percent response rate from 151 schools, only 10 schools, all located within the same school district, came close to including all the required elements in the notification. As a result, only 170 students in the state were tracked as transfers under NCLB.

Thousands of letters or notices in cluttered school bulletins were provided to parents without a clear explanation that the opportunity to transfer to a higher-performing school, with transportation paid for by the school district, is a new option under federal law.

Moreover, several school districts did not follow the spirit of the law when they attempted to sway parents away from transferring their children with statements such as, "Please be aware that if you choose this option your child becomes a student at the receiving district as that district will receive the entire state funding amount."

Another letter sent home to parents stated, "While we don't want this to happen, it is also our responsibility to remind you about Parent Choice. ... It is our hope that you will choose to support us in our improvement efforts."

School principals did notify parents that the school had been identified for School Improvement or Corrective Action status and often explained the school's efforts to improve. However, the vast majority of school principals skipped the requirement to notify parents about how they can become involved in the school to address the problem of low achievement.

NCLB is precise about what form of notification is required to be sent to parents, and there is no excuse for confusing, misleading, or intimidating notification. The Colorado experience points to the importance of holding school districts accountable not only for fulfilling the requirements of the law, but also for living up to the spirit of the law. The performance of the school districts also highlights the need for parents to become informed education consumers.

While this project focused on schools in Colorado, the design of the survey readily lends itself to use in other states. The Education Policy Center welcomes the opportunity to work with organizations in other states to hold their school districts accountable for compliance with NCLB.

Pamela Benigno is the author of "No Child Left Behind Mandates School Choice: Colorado's First Year." She is director of the Education Policy Center at the Independence Institute. Her email address is **Pam@i2i.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The June 2003 Independence Institute Issue Paper by Pam Benigno, "No Child Left Behind Mandates School Choice: Colorado's First Year," is available online at **http://www.i2i.org/articles/9-2003.pdf**.

NCLB Puts Spotlight on Public School Performance

by George A. Clowes

This summer, state departments of education identified which public schools "need improvement" after failing to make "adequate yearly progress" for two years in a row under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Adequate Yearly Progress

For each state, making Adequate Yearly Progress requires continuous and substantial academic improvement for all students, with the same high standards of academic achievement applied to all students in a statistically valid and reliable manner. Academic achievement is measured as the percentage of students who meet state standards in reading and math for their grade level. For high schools, the standards also include a four-year graduation rate.

Under NCLB, states have established annual goals for student achievement such that the percentage of students meeting state standards increases gradually to 100 percent by 2014. Each school must report its performance against these annual state goals by the following student groupings, with at least 95 percent of the students in each group being tested:

- All students
- Racial/ethnic groups
- Economically disadvantaged students
- Students with disabilities
- Students with limited English proficiency

Making Adequate Yearly Progress means a school meets all of the state's proficiency goals for all student groups in a given year.

How Schools Performed

Although 87 percent of the public schools in Kansas achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for all groups, in most states large percentages of schools failed to meet state achievement goals.

In Florida, for example, only 13 percent of the public schools met the state's standards for AYP, which required at least 31 percent of students reading at grade level and 38 percent who could do grade-level math.

In California, only 37 percent of elementary schools and 20 percent of high schools achieved AYP, despite having relatively low achievement hurdles. For elementary schools, making AYP required having at least 13.6 percent of students able to demonstrate proficiency in English language arts, and 16 percent in math. For high schools, making AYP required having at least 11.2 percent of students showing proficiency in English language arts and just 9.6 percent in math.

In Delaware, 43 percent of schools met the state's AYP requirements. In both Pennsylvania and Missouri, about half of the public schools in each state met the minimum standards in reading and math.

Schools Needing Improvement

When a school fails to make AYP for two years running, it is classed as "needing improvement." Title I schools that need improvement are required to offer their students the option of transferring to a better public school. After three years of failing to make AYP—or the second year classified as in need of improvement—low-income students are eligible to receive free tutoring if they do not choose to exercise the transfer option.

In Chicago, for example, 365 of the city's more than 600 schools were determined to be needing improvement, with some 270,000 students eligible for transfer. Although 19,246 students applied for transfers, the city supplied only 1,035 seats in better schools.

Although New York City was one of the few cities that got a tutoring program up and running last year, no date has been set for when tutoring will begin this year and no instructions have yet gone out to parents. Almost a quarter of a million students were eligible for tutoring last year because they were in schools needing improvement, but only about 30,000 students actually requested tutoring. Also, some 88 percent of all the tutoring was provided by the school system—which failed the students in the first place—rather than by for-profit and nonprofit tutoring services.

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Hypocrisy

Continued from page 1

■ 29 percent of Congressional Black Caucus members and 46 percent of Congressional Hispanic Caucus members chose to send at least one child to private school.

Many of the policymakers who exercise choice in their own children's education have voted to block legislation that would have given other families the same range of options. For example, earlier this year the House considered Amendment 90 to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (H.R. 1350), a modest proposal by Representative Jim DeMint (R-South Carolina) to give states the flexibility to establish innovative parental choice programs for students with disabilities.

The proposal was defeated by a vote of 240 to 182 on April 30, 2003. If every member of the House who practices school choice had voted to empower families with disabled children, Amendment 90 would have passed 243-179.

The Senate has not voted on parental choice legislation this term.

Parental Choice Curtailed in NCLB

In the 107th Congress, the survey found similar results. In 2001, the House of Representatives and Senate both rejected amendments to the No Child Left Behind Act that would have given scholarships to children in low-performing or dangerous public schools so they could attend better-performing independent schools. All three amendments would have passed if Members had voted in a way consistent with their own practices.

In 2000, the Heritage Foundation survey found all three parental choice proposals introduced that year would have passed if all those who practiced school choice had supported it for less-fortunate families.

Although some Members of Congress continue to oppose legislation that would give disadvantaged and at-risk students the wider range of educational opportunities offered by school choice programs, public support for such programs is growing, particularly among minorities. Moreover, existing programs enjoy a high level of parental satisfaction.

A poll conducted in July 2002 by Zogby International Polling found 76 percent of respondents "strongly" or "somewhat" supported "providing parents with the option of sending their children to the school of their choice—either public, private, or parochial—rather than only to the school to which they are assigned."

When asked specifically whether they were "in favor of or against allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child's education and permitting them to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public, or parochial school of their choosing," 63 percent of respondents favored the proposal. Rates of approval were even higher among minority respondents.

Parental Choice for DC?

In the near future, the House of Representatives will have the opportunity to vote on an amendment to the District of Columbia appropriations bill modeled after the committee-passed D.C. Parental Choice Incentive Act introduced by Representative Tom Davis (R-Virginia). The proposal would enable low-income parents in the District of Columbia to enroll their children in private schools through a scholarship program. Under the bill, the maximum scholarship is $7,500, and $15 million is authorized for the program.

If every member of the House of Representatives who practices private school choice votes with supporters of school choice to extend the same access to disadvantaged students in the District of Columbia, the amendment will pass.* It will likewise pass in the Senate if those who practice school choice for themselves vote to extend it to other people, too.

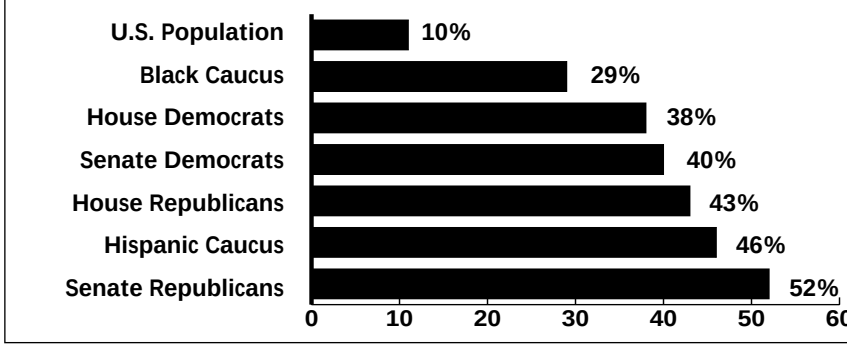
Since the 2002 Heritage Foundation survey was conducted, the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring program, removing the constitutional question from vouchers. Before the first anniversary of the Court's decision, Colorado Governor Bill Owens signed into law the Colorado Opportunity Contract Pilot Program, which will provide vouchers to low-income students in low-performing school districts. Eleven states have state-funded scholarship programs or tax credits for education expenses or contributions to scholarship funds.

Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is **krista.kafer@heritage.org**.

* It passed 209-208 on September 9.

SCHOOL CHOICE BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Percent of each group who send their children to private schools



Source: Heritage Foundation

INTERNET INFO

The September 2003 Heritage Foundation survey, "How Members of Congress Practice School Choice," by Krista Kafer and Jonathan Butcher, is available online at **http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/BG1684.cfm**.

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The Friedman Report

The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization established in 1996 by Milton and Rose Friedman. The origins of the foundation lie in the Friedmans' long-standing concern about the serious deficiencies in America's elementary and secondary public schools. The best way to improve the quality of education, they believe, is to enable all parents to have a truly free choice of the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation works to build upon this vision, clarify its meaning to the general public, and amplify the national call for true education reform through school choice. Contact us at www.friedmanfoundation.org for more information.

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One American Square #1760 Indianapolis, IN 46282

A Convert to School Choice

by Laura J. Swartley

At one time, Missouri House Education Committee Chairwoman Jane Cunningham thought Mae Duggan, Missouri's First Lady of school choice activism, was "nuts."

That was when Cunningham was a newly elected school board official in 1989, listening to Duggan's reasoning on giving parents choice in the education of their children. It was not until Cunningham had spent some time as an insider on the politics of public education in her high-expenditure, highly esteemed district that she realized the central problem in American education was evident in her own hometown: a monopoly that precludes true reform and reinforces policies that produce mediocrity.

"I could not even get the Board to discuss a survey or exit interview [with parents who had left the system]," Cunningham said. She wanted to find out why 50 percent of parents in the wealthy district were choosing private schooling over the public schools—"what it was they did not like about the educational product they were paying for with their taxes."

Cunningham was shocked and sickened when she was let in on the prevailing attitude about the flight to private schools: "We have fewer children to educate and we still get their taxes," was the response of her school board colleagues.

In the school district where Cunningham lived, "the reason they did not change as a result of families leaving and the reason they almost welcomed it, was money," Cunningham explained. "Because they are a very wealthy district, the district receives only about $200 from the state per child annually. The rest is from local property taxes.

"That statement lit a fire inside of me that won't go out," she said. "The results of the monopoly were easy to recognize with my economics background, and I became a convert to the parental choice, educational freedom movement."

In short, Mae Duggan, who had been working towards educational freedom since 1959, was "no longer 'nuts.'"

Soon thereafter, Cunningham moved one of her sons from the public school system to a Catholic school. After making As and Bs in math at his public school, he tested at only the 30th percentile in math computation at his new school, Immacolata Elementary.

"The staff at the Catholic school thought he must have a learning disability, because they could not imagine his local school had done such a poor job," she said. After intensive personal attention by his teacher, her son rose to the 90th percentile in math. Cunningham wrote a letter to her local newspaper about her son's experience.

"My hat's off to Catholic Schools Superintendent George Henry," she wrote, pointing out her son's rise in math skills. "The per-pupil expenditure at the public school is over $9,000 while the tuition for a non-Catholic at Immacolata is $2,500. The funds should follow the results."

Cunningham's son is now a sophomore at the University of Texas on a Navy R.O.T.C. scholarship.

As a result of these experiences, Cunningham began working more fervently for school choice. She was elected to the state legislature, eventually becoming chair of the House Education Committee. She has come to the conclusion that it is the "one-size-fits-all" public school model that creates the most problems. She does not understand why public school leaders usually disdain the concept of school choice, and fear it.

"If they are providing a quality educational product, it will be a revenue producer for them because families would line up to get in," she said.

In 2003, Cunningham sponsored two school choice bills, both designed "to get folks comfortable with the concept." One bill addressed the issue of access to programs in public schools denied to non-public schoolchildren whose families were residing in and paying taxes to the public schools. The other, HB 345, would have given school choice to at-risk children in low-income families and in families where a parent is a prison inmate. Although neither bill passed, she was happy to be able to bring some Black Caucus members on board with HB 345.

Combining her concerns for the social good and fiscal responsibility, Cunningham suggests the following approach: "I believe if we offered families one-half of what it costs to educate a child in their local public school if they chose to move to a non-public school, we would have happier, higher-achieving students and the states would all have balanced budgets with the money saved."

Laura J. Swartley is communications director with the Milton and Rose Friedman Foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her email address is **laura@friemanfoundation.org**.

School Choice Roundup

by Laura J. Swartley

COLORADO

New Charter Tries Same-Sex Classes

Colorado's James Irwin Charter Middle School will be trying same-sex classrooms this Fall. The new Core Knowledge school also will require uniforms. Both are attempts to neutralize the effects of peer pressure and boy-girl interaction at the middle school age.

"It's been going great," said teacher Diane Detty. "You don't have the boys showing off for the girls and likewise. The kids who are more reserved are more willing to speak out and participate."

Colorado Springs Gazette
September 4, 2003

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Feinstein Pledges Support for Voucher Plan

The landmark voucher proposal for the District of Columbia gained steam in early September when Democratic Senator and voucher convert Dianne Feinstein (California) promised a 'Yes' vote on the plan. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Feinstein said she would break party ranks to vote on the measure and the District's $5.6 billion budget for fiscal 2004.

Feinstein's defection illustrates "the kind of ferment that was inevitable in the Democratic Party if they are ever going to honestly confront the issue of school choice," Chip Mellor told the *Post*. Mellor is president and general counsel of the Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm that has defended voucher programs in courts across the country.

Washington Post
September 4, 2003

Voucher Plan Prompts Exchange

During the August Congressional recess, *The Wall Street Journal* ran a continuing dialogue among voucher advocates and opponents prompted by positions taken in the fight for school choice in the nation's capital. Letters appeared from American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman, People for the American Way President Ralph Neas, Senator Mary Landrieu (D-Louisiana), Friedman Foundation President Gordon St. Angelo, D.C. Parents for School Choice Executive Director Virginia Walden Ford, and Heartland Institute President Joseph Bast.

When Neas wrote to the *Journal*, impugning the D.C. voucher effort as a right-wing effort with D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams as its pawn, the Friedman Foundation's St. Angelo replied:

"The Friedman Foundation believes that all parents should be empowered to choose the very best school for their children, and that the very poor will benefit the most from such freedom of choice. It is disingenuous, therefore, to argue that we do not support more choices for poor students in the District. As Milton Friedman has argued, 'I have nothing but good things to say about voucher programs, like those in Milwaukee and Cleveland, that are limited to a small number of low-income participants.'

"More insidious, however, is the attempt by Mr. Neas to try and paint Mayor Williams with the right-wing brush. Frankly, if Mr. Neas truly cared about the plight of poor students in the District, then he would do everything he could to back a mayor who is willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that his students have

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access to the best possible schools, whether those schools are public, charter or private."

Ford, of D.C. Parents for School Choice, responded as follows:

"Regarding the spate of letters about Washington's proposed school voucher plan. ... When segregationist politicians blocked schoolhouse doors in Alabama more than 40 years ago, their decision to rob poor children of a quality education was a cruel act of racism. Today, some African-American leaders, Capitol Hill lawmakers and union officials are blocking schoolhouse doors once again. ... The District parents in my organization believe the time has long passed to help hundreds of D.C. schoolchildren who are stuck in underperforming schools. ...

"Senator Landrieu [an opponent of the proposal] was thoroughly embarrassed in July when the child of a D.C. parent asked her what school her own children attended and she admitted it was Georgetown Day, an elite private school. She further insulted parents by telling them that a school choice program could not help them get their children into Georgetown Day since tuition was too expensive. ...

"We can no longer stand by while a few politicians condemn our children to a life of lost opportunities and unfulfilled dreams. The politicians must step away from the door, and let our children go."

Wall Street Journal
August 14, 2003
August 20, 2003

FLORIDA

Tax Credit Scholarships Come Under Fire

The accountability of private schools receiving voucher money through Florida's corporate tax credit scholarship program is continuing to receive intense scrutiny. Earlier this year, it was revealed the Islamic Academy of Florida in Tampa had ties with a member of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. As a result, the school was removed from participation in the scholarship program. According to Education Commissioner Jim Horne, that response exemplified how the program was accountable.

"While we were fairly confident that the dollars were only used to educate students ... we collectively made the decision to take children out of harm's way," Horne told the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*. "To taint the whole program because of that one incident is unfair."

However, Horne pointed out parental accountability injects the most critical form of accountability into the program: "It's a powerful accountability measure," he told *El Nuevo Herald* in July. "A free marketplace type of accountability made us the most powerful nation on the planet."

Voucher advocate Tina Dupree of Florida Child suggested parents had a very straightforward measure of accountability: "If your child can read, write, spell and do math, then we know that school has been accountable," she told the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*.

Horne launched a statewide series of forums in early August that featured panels of pro- and anti-voucher speakers. At the Miami forum, parents extolled the merits of their newly chosen private schools to the *Miami Herald*.

"The results are phenomenal," said parent Renford Williams, whose daughter attends Redemptive Life in Miami.

The *Herald* reported the Miami meeting turned raucous when Democrat Representative Dan Gelber commandeered the microphone and accused the state of losing control of the voucher program. Horne responded there "are rules in place," and said the administrators of the program go above and beyond state requirements for accountability.

John Kirtley, chairman of Florida PRIDE, responded to further criticism that the corporate tax credit program hides corporate donor identities and lacks oversight.

"The law requires annual financial and compliance audits, which our fund has already submitted to the Auditor General," Kirtley told *El Nuevo Herald*. "Not a penny of tax-credited funds can be used for administration or fund-raising. The income of every family has been documented every year to safeguard the integrity of the program."

He noted "scholarships are given to parents, not schools," and 95 percent of the 400 participating schools used a "nationally recognized test such as the Stanford-9 or the Iowa Basic Skills. Parents use test scores and their own knowledge of their children to judge academic progress."

Sarasota Herald Tribune
August 2, 2003
Miami Herald
August 2, 2003
August 4, 2003
El Nuevo Herald
July 31, 203
August 4, 2003

ILLINOIS

Speaking "the Truth" in Chicago

In the midst of a decidedly anti-voucher event, an AFL-CIO forum in Chicago, Democratic Presidential hopeful Joseph Lieberman articulated his stance on school choice. He announced he would support a pilot voucher program in the District of Columbia, a statement that brought a strong negative reaction from the audience.

"I'm going to speak the truth," Lieberman responded to the hissing and booing crowd. "I'm going to say what I think about what's best for America."

CNN.com
August 7, 2003

LOUISIANA

DC Group Attacks Landrieu on Vouchers

In early September, D.C. Parents for School Choice ran a full-page ad in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* criticizing Senator Mary Landrieu's hypocrisy on the issue of school vouchers. Landrieu had supported vouchers in the past but had turned negative on the D.C. scholarship proposal.

"We always felt that Mary Landrieu was a good friend for parents in D.C. and cared about our children, which made her vote such a terrible disappointment," Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, told the Associated Press.

The ad featured a picture of a District school child, with the caption: "My mom wants you to know that Sen. Mary Landrieu doesn't want me to go to the same school where her children go."

Landrieu was quoted by the AP as saying: "We need the right kind of scholarship program or none at all." The Louisiana Federation of Teachers President Fred Skelton defended Landrieu, saying she was only supporting her constituents. However, polling in Louisiana last spring showed significant support for vouchers in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. (See "Louisiana: Foster Offers Voucher Plan," Friedman Report School Choice Roundup, *School Reform News*, May 2003.)

The Lafayette Advertiser
September 3, 2003

MICHIGAN

Public School Choice Continues to Grow

Three times more Michigan residents opted for public school choice in 2001 than in 1997, according to a report from The Heritage Foundation.

Inter-district school choice in Michigan was enacted in 1996 and expanded in 1999. The Heritage study showed 26,000 Michigan students were enrolled outside of their home districts, the *Holland Sentinel* reported recently.

The Holland Public Schools, a popular choice for parents, have benefitted from public school choice by gaining students. That gain compensates for the hundreds of students the Holland public schools have lost to charter schools. Although neighboring districts have agreements not to market in the other's area, the state legislature intended the program to spur improvement through competition.

In the absence of direct advertising, features that drive school choice decisions are word-of-mouth, familiarity, and tradition. "My son graduated from there, I graduated from there, we wanted [our daughter] to graduate from [that] school," reasoned one parent.

Senate Education Committee Chair Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland) questions why marketing is considered a bad idea. "Each district should make its case. Why is that different from any other enterprise? When you're one enterprise, you have to market yourself," he told the *Holland Sentinel*.

Holland Sentinel
August 8, 2003

NEW JERSEY

Poll Shows Strong Support for School Vouchers

A recent poll commissioned by local school choice advocates shows 66 percent of New Jersey families support vouchers. The poll was conducted on behalf of Excellent Education for Everyone (E3) by the Eagleton Institute of Politics Center for Public Interest Polling.

Respondents were asked, "Would you vote for or against a system of giving parents the option of using government-funded school vouchers to pay for tuition at the public, private or religious school of their choice?"

Sixty-one percent of Democrats, 68 percent of Independents, and 76 percent of Republicans said they would vote in favor of vouchers.

Support for vouchers was substantial across a wide range of income brackets, with favorable responses received from 70 percent of respondents making less than $50,000 a year and by 64 percent of respondents making $50,000-$100,000 a year. Minorities in New Jersey's urban centers were especially supportive. Seventy-five percent of urban responders—72 percent of whom live in state's special needs, or Abbott, districts—said they would vote for vouchers.

Excellent Education for Everyone
June 6 2003

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"The college graduation rate among inner-city students nationally is below 10 percent," the school's annual report states bluntly. "Our mission is to reverse that underachievement."

MATCH

Continued from page 1

but raises the goal: not just 12th-grade proficiency, but rigorous college prep. And MATCH is succeeding, with a model involving massive amounts of one-on-one tutoring provided by volunteer tutors and students in college work-study programs.

One of the ongoing problems in K-12 education stems from students who enter kindergarten lacking the skills necessary to succeed even at that starting level, a situation that applies disproportionately to children from low-income families. When such shortcomings are not corrected in kindergarten, social promotion pushes those students into higher and higher grades, where they find themselves increasingly unable to cope. Many drop out once they encounter the learning demands of high school.

"In theory, we can all posit taking children at the pre-kindergarten level, providing them with the skills they need to succeed in K-12 school, and solving the education problem that way," MATCH School's founder and CEO Michael Goldstein told a group of educators and business representatives recently in Boston at the EDVentures 2003 Conference of the Education Industry Association. The real challenge, said Goldstein, is to design a school that takes students already in the K-12 system from where they are now to where they need to be by 12th grade.

Goldstein, formerly a New York City journalist who wrote for *Business Week* and other publications, developed the MATCH school plan in 1998. In 1999, it was one of only five charters the state approved, out of 31 applications.

The school's target population is disadvantaged Boston students, especially those who have been led to exclude a university education from their expectations. The school's aim is to prepare those children to succeed in college and beyond—in short, to transform their lives.

Founding Principal Charles Sposato, who welcomes every student each morning, here greets MATCH student Vasthi Ettienne.

Michael Goldstein
MATCH School founder and CEO

Mission: To Reverse Underachievement

"The college graduation rate among inner-city students nationally is below 10 percent," the school's annual report states bluntly. "Our mission is to reverse that underachievement."

The school's student body is roughly two-thirds African-American, a quarter Hispanic, and less than 10 percent white and Asian. About three-quarters of the students come from families that live in poverty, a rate higher than the average for Boston. Like the vast majority of students entering Boston high schools, students entering the MATCH School are on track to fail their 10th-grade MCAS state exams (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System).

"The first thing we have to do is to convince them that college is for them," said Goldstein, noting that for most students, this would be the first time anyone in their families had gone to college.

The next step is the really difficult one: actually bringing students up to college prep level. Four out of five entering students have failed their 8th-grade MCAS exams and generally perform two to three years below grade level. To succeed, they must make academic gains at the rate of at least 1.5 grade levels per year over their four years in high school.

Huge Gains

When the first group of MATCH students took the 10th-grade MCAS exams, 80 percent passed the math exam and 94 percent passed the English exam. This year, the pass rate was 100 percent after a retake opportunity.

"These students are making huge gains over baseline," said Goldstein.

Goldstein pointed out the school has established very rigorous standards for promotion to 10th grade. Ninth-graders are not promoted to 10th grade until they have passed the 8th-grade English and math MCAS exams; they must also pass at least three of four core classes with at least a C average. Forty percent of students were not promoted in 2000-01, 28 percent in 2001-02, and about 25 percent in 2002-03.

Parents of non-promoted students remain very positive about the school, and parents overall are very satisfied, rating the school 9.3 on a scale of 1 to 10 in 2001-02. They rated their children's various former middle schools at 6.8. When the school first opened, it received three applications for every one available seat; that ratio was 10-to-1 at the start of the 2003-04 school year, with 400 students applying for just 40 openings.

Lots of Tutoring

What is the MATCH School's strategy for bringing students to grade level? The secret is tutoring: approximately four hours a week for every student. The job of the tutor is not to help the student with his or her homework, but to go through a sequential process of instruction in read-

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ing, math, and science in order to raise the student's academic skills and knowledge to the levels required for a college prep curriculum.

In the first year of the school's operation, the tutoring—which is free to the students—was done by recruiting dozens of unpaid volunteers and mentors. As the school grew in size, the need for tutors increased and recruiting adequate numbers of good, qualified, and dependable tutors became a major challenge. In the second year, school officials discovered they could augment the volunteer tutors by tapping into a largely unused pool of tutors through the college work-study program.

Now, during the summer, 75 of MATCH's students go to the nearby MIT campus for four hours of tutoring each day. In addition, this year, every 9th- and 10th-grader at MATCH will be tutored for eight hours on the weekend by college students from MIT, Boston University, Boston College, and Harvard University.

Replicable Model

Colleges that accept federal work-study funds must allocate 7 percent of that money to community service, and paying undergraduates to tutor local schoolchildren meets that requirement. Although MATCH's volunteer tutors are unpaid, the work-study tutors cost MATCH about $2 an hour, with the bulk of each undergraduate tutor's pay coming from the work-study program and the college.

"MATCH is succeeding, with a model involving massive amounts of one-on-one tutoring provided by volunteer tutors and students in college work-study programs."

Goldstein believes the work-study model is replicable elsewhere. As far as he's concerned, it's a win-win-win-win situation: the college gets to meet its grant requirement; the undergraduate gets a much more satisfying job to do than, for example, reshelving library books; MATCH gets cost-effective access to a large number of tutors; and, best of all, disadvantaged youngsters get tutored and mentored by some of the nation's best and brightest college students.

It's a good match.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

INTERNET INFO

The MATCH School's Annual Report for 2002 is available at the Web site of the Massachusetts Department of Education at **http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2002/annual/0469.pdf**.
The MATCH School's Web site is **http://www.matchschool.org**.

Title I Tutoring Vouchers?

Work-study programs are not the only way to engage college students in tutoring programs. A parent with a child who needs tutoring could easily post a flyer in a college dorm to hire a student, work-study or not, to sit with that child at the kitchen table every weekend at, say, $10 per hour, and work on math and reading skills or on homework.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires failing schools to provide outside tutoring, but that provision has not yet been leveraged on behalf of parents, argues MATCH School founder and CEO Michael Goldstein. When asked, administrators at failing schools usually point parents to existing tutoring programs. However, if school districts offered the $1,000 per student of Title 1 funds to low-income parents as a tutoring voucher, this would enable parents to make their own decisions about tutors, including hiring college students.

The MATCH School's experience with tutors indicates some structure quickly develops as numbers increase. At MIT, the work-study tutors are organizing themselves into groups of eight, with at least two in each group from the previous year's program to ensure experience is passed on to new tutors. The MATCH School also organizes a tutor fair where tutors offer their expertise and the times when they are available, and parents shop around for the tutor who provides the best fit for the needs of their children.

"The MATCH School also organizes a tutor fair and parents shop around for the tutor who provides the best fit for the needs of their children."

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RACE AND EDUCATION

an interview with Abigail Thernstrom by George A. Clowes

The U.S. Supreme Court's recent 5-4 ruling in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which allows an applicant's race to be considered as a factor in college admission decisions, raises profound policy questions about American K-12 education: What causes the racial gap in academic achievement? Can it be closed, or will black, Hispanic, and Native American students—on average—always score lower than their white and Asian counterparts?

Those are questions Manhattan Institute scholar Abigail Thernstrom was inevitably led to during her work over the past two decades on race and racial inequality in American society. She and her husband, Harvard University historian Stephan Thernstrom, are coauthors of a timely new book, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (Simon & Schuster, October 2003). Their earlier book, *Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (Simon & Schuster, 1997), was named one of the notable books of 1997 by the *New York Times Book Review*.

A decade earlier, Ms. Thernstrom's book, *Whose Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights* (Harvard University Press, 1987), was named the best policy studies book of the year by the Policy Studies Organization, an affiliate of the American Political Science Association. The book garnered four other awards, including the American Bar Association's Certificate of Merit and the Anisfield-Wolf prize for the best book on race and ethnicity.

A senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute in New York, Thernstrom also is a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education and a commissioner on the United States Commission on Civil Rights. She serves on several boards, including the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Institute for Justice. She received her Ph.D. in 1975 from the Department of Government at Harvard University.

Thernstrom was one of three authors chosen by President Bill Clinton to participate in his first Town Meeting on race in Akron, Ohio, on December 3, 1997, and she was part of a small group that met with Clinton again in the Oval Office on December 19. She has appeared frequently on *Fox News Sunday*, *Good Morning America*, and *This Week with George Stephanopoulos*.

Thernstrom's work appears regularly in a variety of journals and newspapers, including *The New Republic*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Public Interest*. She recently spoke with *School Reform News* Managing Editor George Clowes.

Clowes: *How did you become interested in education reform?*

Thernstrom: I'm a political scientist by training, and American constitutional law is my field, but I quickly moved into writing almost exclusively on issues connected to race and ethnicity. Going down that road inevitably led me to the question of education and the disparate performance of different racial and ethnic groups. I also wrote a little book called *School Choice in Massachusetts*, which brought me to the attention of Governor Weld, and he appointed me to the state Board of Education here in Massachusetts.

Clowes: *The U.S. Supreme Court's recent rulings in* Gratz v. Bollinger *and* Grutter v. Bollinger *centered on affirmative action. How did the Court resolve the issue?*

Thernstrom: The issue in both cases was racial preferences in higher education. *Gratz* involved undergraduates at the University of Michigan. The question in *Grutter* was the University's law school admissions.

In the admission process for undergraduates, the college was actually assigning points for the color of the applicant's skin. On a 150-point scale, a student automatically got 20 points if he or she was black, Hispanic, or Native American. Asians did not count for the purpose of preferences, even though they're a racial group that historically suffered from severe discrimination.

The law school had a more deliberative, individualistic process—in theory. In fact, a former admissions officer acknowledged, as the process wore on, the admissions office looked daily at how the number of black students stacked up—whether the school was getting what it regarded as a "critical mass." If it wasn't, the criteria for admission were adjusted.

And thus the two admissions processes were not very different. The law school engaged in a race-driven process that was a little more camouflaged than that of the undergraduate college, but, as Justice Scalia suggested, both so zealously pursued the aim of creating a "critical mass" as to erase the distinction between a quota and a permissible goal.

In *Gratz,* the Supreme Court ruled that actually assigning 20 points for skin color was a bit over the line, and the plaintiffs prevailed. But in *Grutter*, the Court found the Law School's allegedly more "individualistic," more "holistic" system constitutionally acceptable, and *Grutter* is the important decision. *Gratz* is not consequential. Every selective school in the country can hide its effort to meet de facto quotas by claiming to look at each applicant's individual strengths and weaknesses, while in fact making race or ethnicity the determinative factor in its ultimate decision to accept or reject a student.

And indeed, the new University of Michigan undergraduate application both asks students to identify their race or ethnicity and to write an essay on diversity. The college has clearly found a way to maintain its racial and ethnic quotas without its old point system. Every student has to demonstrate his or her commitment to "diversity," whatever that means. It's a political test for admissions, and a way of identifying all black and Latino applicants for the purpose of race-driven admissions.

The High Court, in these two decisions, broke new constitutional ground in declaring diversity to be a "compelling state interest." And in doing so, it has given a green light to racial double standards—to different criteria depending on the racial identity of the applicant. It is now constitutionally permissible to admit some students on the basis of their race, which means that others will be rejected for the same reason, as Michael Kinsley has argued in a splendid *Washington Post* op-ed. The admission of a student is a yes or no question, and the racial identity of a student either changes the result or doesn't. The whole point of identifying non-Asian minority applicants is to ensure a certain racial mix in the student body.

"The pool of high-performing black students is tragically too small—which is the real civil rights crisis of our day."

Clowes: *Didn't the university admission standards include a cut-off for the minimum level of academic proficiency required to be able to do law school work?*

Thernstrom: Neither the college nor the law school admitted students who had no hope of surviving, and thus they settled for less than racial and ethnic representation in proportion to the overall population numbers. Proportionality—by the standard of national population figures—would have meant admitting a student body that was 12 percent black, but the university could not find a sufficient number of academically qualified African-American students to meet that goal. The pool of high-performing black students is tragically too small—which is the real civil rights crisis of our day.

But in its determined search for non-Asian minority students who could survive, it admitted blacks and His-

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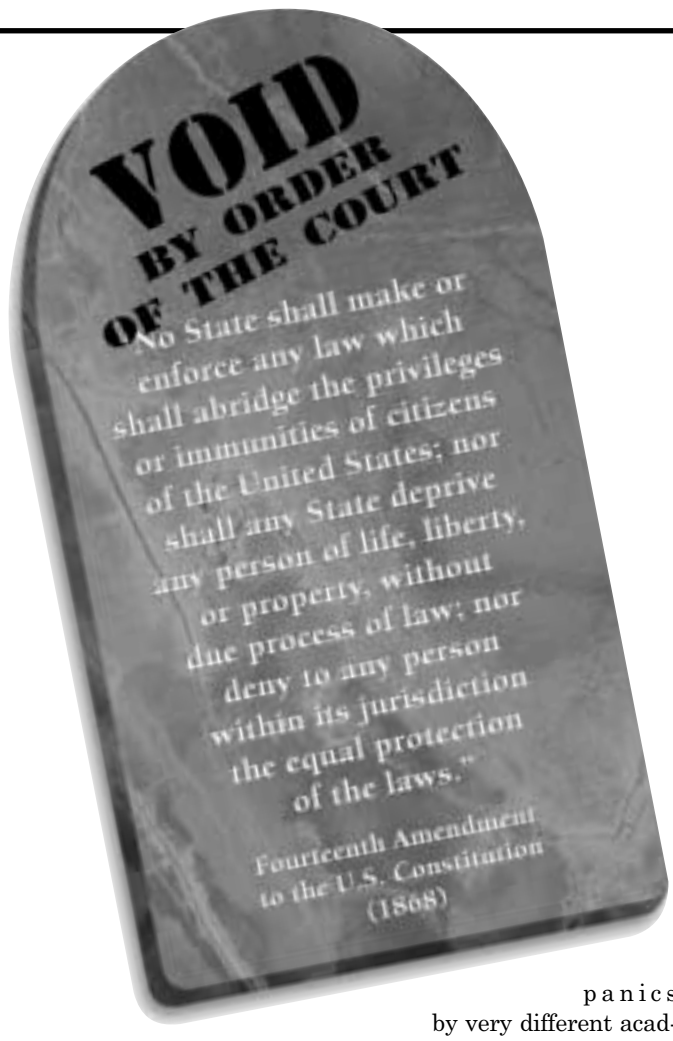
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No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."
Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1868)

DEFERRED
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OF THE COURT
"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.' "...I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."
Martin Luther King, Jr. August 28, 1963

panics by very different academic criteria than those which whites and Asians had to meet. And thus, 83 percent of black and Hispanic students applying to the law school whose grades and LSAT scores put them into the 30th percentile of all applicants were admitted, while the school took only 1 percent of the whites and Asians who fell in that percentile rank. That's called racial double standards.

Clowes: *Doesn't the 14th Amendment have something to say about this?*

Thernstrom: These were both 14th Amendment cases. The 14th Amendment provides equal protection of the laws. Racial classifications are "constitutionally suspect." Properly so, I might add.

The Court has always distinguished racial classifications from those based on any other characteristic—age, gender, and so forth—because of the nation's long and ugly history of distributing burdens and benefits on the basis of the color of an individual's skin. All racial sorting, the Court has held, has to be narrowly tailored for a compelling state interest. That has been a tough test to meet. The amorphous, undefined "interest" in diversity was never held to be "compelling."

Twenty-five years ago, in *The University of California v. Bakke*, involving racial preferences in medical school admissions, Justice Powell was alone in finding diversity to be a compelling state interest. Now, however, Powell's view is that of a majority of five on the Court. Justice O'Connor said she hoped racial preferences wouldn't be necessary in 25 years, but preferences are likely to be an entitlement by then. And what will be the test of sufficient "diversity"? How will we know when that undefined goal will have been reached?

Clowes: *So the* Grutter *decision didn't really address the issue of how well different racial groups are prepared for college work?*

Thernstrom: No, it papers over it. The ruling implies that, without racial preferences, blacks and Hispanics will sink because they just can't meet white and Asian standards. American educators constantly and rightly bemoan the low academic expectations that many K-12 schools have for non-Asian minority children, but this Supreme Court ruling, in effect, sanctions those low expectations and writes them into 14th Amendment law.

A typical black student in 12th grade is reading at an 8th-grade level, and Hispanics don't do much better. In most subjects, the majority of black students by the end of high school do not have even a "partial mastery" of the skills and knowledge that the National Assessment of Educational Progress—called NAEP—says are "fundamental for proficient work."

In math, only 0.2 percent of black 12th-graders score at the advanced level, which is NAEP's highest achievement rank. The figure for whites is 11 times higher, and for Asians it's 37 times higher. Hispanic scores are not significantly different from those of blacks.

About the same percentage of blacks and whites go on to college—approximately two-thirds—but they're not equally prepared. Many blacks enter with extremely weak academic records and a high percentage end up taking remedial classes. Only one in six blacks actually finishes college, compared to about one in three whites.

Clowes: *What do we need to do to improve the academic proficiency of non-Asian minority students?*

Thernstrom: Teach the kids! This is not—I cannot emphasize too strongly—an IQ problem. Over the past two decades, we've had a lot of programs and we've thrown a lot of money at the problem, but the solutions have been woefully inadequate. The picture is changing for the better—states are setting standards and requiring students to pass high school exit exams, and the No Child Left Behind Act requires testing in grades 3-8, with the scores broken down by race, ethnicity, and other factors. Districts with a high number of academically skilled students who are white and Asian will no longer be able to hide the racial gap in academic achievement behind the overall averages.

We need to set high academic standards and high behavioral standards in all our schools. We need order and civility in the classroom so that teachers can teach. We need teachers who really know math and know how to teach it. The list of needed reforms is long.

Everyone agrees that we must have better teachers, but we won't get them unless we restructure the nature of the job and the salary scale. Schools must be able to pay differential salaries depending on the job teachers do and the quality of their work, as most sectors of the economy do. There needs to be a professional ladder so that ambitious teachers who do not want to go into administration aren't doing precisely the same thing at age 60 that they were doing at age 25.

"Justice O'Connor said she hoped racial preferences wouldn't be necessary in 25 years, but ... what will be the test of sufficient 'diversity'? How will we know when that undefined goal will have been reached?"

We are not going to get better teachers until we really change the job. Who's becoming a teacher these days? With very few exceptions, it's not the academically skilled students. For example, if you were to do a survey of Harvard graduates, you would find that hardly any of them of them choose to become teachers.

Parents must have more of a say in the school their children attend. Quality schools are usually ones in which both teachers and students want to be there. In addition, one definition of belonging to the middle class is the ability to pick a school for your children—either by choosing a place of residence or paying tuition. As a matter of basic equity, that should be an entitlement of low-income parents, too.

No middle-class parent would ever stand for getting a computer printout from the school district, saying her three children were being assigned to three different schools across the city somewhere, none of which she would have chosen, given a chance to do so.

Within the limits of space available, parents should decide where their children go to school. Their options should include public schools, charter schools, parochial, and private schools. Some of the best schools in the country operate under charters and are free of the collective bargaining agreements that prevent, for instance, differential salaries for teachers.

Clowes: *Some say the achievement gap comes from urban school systems not spending as much money on the education of non-Asian minorities as suburban school systems spend on white and Asian children.*

Thernstrom: That's factually incorrect. Overwhelmingly minority districts do not have significantly less money than heavily white suburban ones. And the modest difference cannot explain the racial gap in achievement.

Money can be used well, but money per se does not ensure quality education. Cambridge, Massachusetts, spends $17,000 per pupil every year and yet has low student performance and a wide racial gap in achievement. In 1985 a district court ordered Kansas City, Missouri, to pour money into schools; 15 years and $2 billion later, test scores were just as dismal as ever.

Clowes: *What about the complaint that the problem comes from having white teachers teaching black students?*

Thernstrom: There's no evidence that black students do better with black teachers. If that were so, in districts where there's a high concentration of black teachers—such as Atlanta and Washington, DC—there would be better test results. In fact, the NAEP test results for the District of Columbia are among the very worst in the country.

There's no reason to assume this kind of color-coding should be important. Good teachers are good teachers, no matter what color they are. That should be very welcome news because it will be difficult to increase dramatically the number of academically skilled, high-performing black students who choose teaching as a career. Those students have so many other doors of opportunity open to them. They can go into law, medicine, or business—professions that are prestigious and pay much more than teaching. Relatively few black youngsters come from families with a great deal of accumulated wealth; many are first-generation middle class, and they will head to the jobs that are less frustrating and well-paid.

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Study Shows Teacher Hiring Practices Need Work

Profession also is predominantly white, female

by Lisa Snell

Is it low pay that causes the teaching profession to have so few males and minorities, as the nation's largest teacher union contends? A convincing counter-argument can be made that it is the profession's burdensome entry barriers—i.e., the certification process—that turns these groups away from teaching.

The irony is that most school administrators take little account of a candidate's pedagogical skills or other components of certification when they actually hire teachers, according to a new study.

In late August the National Education Association (NEA) released the latest version of "The Status of the American Public School Teacher," which reports only 20 percent of teachers are men, a 40-year low, and only 10 percent are minority. Updated every five years, the report draws its latest findings from the 2000-2001 school year.

The NEA report contends low teacher pay is largely to blame for the small number of male and minority teachers. As an NEA spokesman explained in a widely printed AP story about the study, "So what makes teaching less attractive to men and minorities? A mix of factors, but mainly the fact that it's easier to earn more money with less stress in other fields."

"[M]ost school administrators take little account of a candidate's pedagogical skills or other components of certification when they actually hire teachers ..."

The NEA's arguments about low pay appear to have had a positive impact on teacher salaries over the years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in constant 2001-2002 dollars, the average teacher salary in 1959 was $30,292; by 2001 the average teacher salary was $44,604.

Barriers to Entry

However, teacher pay may not be the only credible reason for the small numbers of men and minorities entering the profession. The NEA report pays scant attention to the possibility that potential new teachers are dissuaded by the complex teacher certification process and lack of administrative support once a teacher becomes certified.

Many teaching programs have burdensome certification requirements disproportionate to the benefits received by those who are ultimately certified. Preparing for teacher certification usually includes many courses in child development, the foundations of education, and classroom diversity, with little attention paid to content knowledge.

Education courses have a reputation for including some of the least interesting and least rigorous content available to college students. Data from the 2003 SATs reveals education majors rank at the bottom in SAT scores with a 965. Potential teachers may object to the years of pedagogy classes they must take before being allowed to enter a classroom.

While prospective teachers may spend a significant amount of time studying pedagogy, principals seem to pay scant attention to a teacher's skills before inviting him or her into the classroom. A new study shows the teacher certification process has little effect on the actual hiring practices of school administrators.

An April 2003 study by Edward Liu of the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers reports on district hiring practices. The study examines the results of a survey of 486 teachers asked to comment on the hiring process they went through in four states: California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan.

Significant study findings include:

- While most new teachers were interviewed by school administrators one or two times, one in five teachers in Florida were never interviewed at all.
- Only 7.5 percent of new teachers in the four-state pool taught a sample lesson as part of the hiring process, suggesting few hiring decisions are based on an authentic demonstration of a candidate's teaching ability.
- Only about one in four new teachers were asked to submit standardized test scores or writing samples.
- Many new teachers were hired quite late. The study found 33 percent of new teachers were hired after the school year had already started, and 62 percent were hired within 30 days of when they were to start teaching.
- Only 50 percent of new teachers interviewed with any of their future teacher colleagues as part of the hiring process.
- More than 56 percent reported no extra assistance was available to them as new teachers.
- 43 percent of new teachers reported going through their entire first year of teaching without being observed by a mentor or more experienced teacher.

"The study reveals that many schools are not organized to hire and support new teachers in ways that help them enter the profession smoothly and attain early success," Liu concludes.

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is **lsnell@reason.org**.

Principal Hiring "Idiocy"

The recent experience of a Georgia publisher "helping" to hire a new school principal for the Atlanta Public Schools indicates it's not only the *teacher* hiring process that leaves much to be desired.

As a member of the Local School Council for the John Hope Elementary School, S. Richard Gard Jr., editor and publisher of the *Fulton County Daily Report*, had a seat at the principal-search table when the school needed to replace its retiring principal. The process for selecting a new principal, he found, wasn't like any process used to select top managers in business.

He discovered:

- He wasn't allowed to see the candidates' resumes either before or during the interview, because that would violate their privacy;
- He wasn't allowed to ask different questions of different candidates, because that would be unfair;
- He was allowed to read one of the nine questions, written by school staff, that were asked of all candidates—if the candidate didn't use up too much of his or her 30-minute interview time with long answers;
- To rate each candidate's "depth of knowledge," he was given a list of 44 words and phrases to listen for in grading their responses.

Gard was assured the same procedures for talent search were used throughout the school system. He was hardly comforted by that fact, noting, "The village idiocy ... is systemic."

Gard offered this free advice to Atlanta Public Schools Superintendent Beverly L. Hall in a recent op-ed in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*:

- Don't waste people's time. Either involve parents and local business people in the selection decision, or don't;
- If your lawyers are telling you this is the way to run interviews, find yourself some better lawyers;
- Focus your hiring procedures on finding the best and brightest, not on avoiding claims of unfairness.

INTERNET INFO

The April 2003 study by Edward Liu, "New Teachers' Experiences of Hiring: Preliminary Findings from a 4-state Study," is available online at **http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/Liu%20Hiring%20AERA2003.pdf**.

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Valedictorian Flunks Graduation Test

Exit exams expose grade inflation as a cruel fraud

by George A. Clowes

School officials in Beaufort County, South Carolina, have institutionalized grade inflation by guaranteeing their high school students a minimum first-semester grade of at least 62 out of 100, so students who start the year badly aren't prevented from passing a class if they improve in the second semester.

"What we're trying to do is look at how we can send the message to students that we want them, number one, to be successful," Deputy Superintendent Edna Crews told the *Charleston Post and Courier* in August. "We want to give kids some hope."

Unfortunately, instead of leading to success, grade inflation is more likely to lead to failure, dashed hopes, broken dreams, and public humiliation. Just ask Bridget Green, who in May was looking forward to completing her education at Alcee Fortier Senior High School in New Orleans by graduating as the class valedictorian, delivering the commencement speech, and then enrolling in community college. But despite her superior grades, Green could not pass a math proficiency exam required for graduation; she not only lost her starring role as valedictorian, but was not even allowed to graduate.

"The teachers and administrators at Fortier High have some explaining to do. If the senior with the best grades can't pass a 10th-grade test, what, if anything, are students being taught?"

EDITORS
THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

Now, instead of being in college classes, Green is in counseling, devastated by embarrassment and shock, according to a recent Associated Press account. Her guardian, Karen Alexander, faults the school for not covering the curriculum that is tested, and she is considering suing the school.

Another parent, Gregory Guth, already has sued the New Orleans district, saying the education it provides is so bad parents are forced to turn to private schools. The suit, filed by Guth and his wife Maria in state court on August 21, seeks reimbursement of the tuition they and other parents paid to private schools over the past 10 years because the state did not live up to its obligation to "provide a free and appropriate education."

"An Ideal Student"

Green's story first appeared in *The Times-Picayune* on August 10, in a long, poignant article by the New Orleans newspaper's staff writer Aesha Rasheed. According to her teachers and peers, Green was "an ideal student"—studious, athletic, and outgoing. She was on her school's basketball and track teams but had a college-prep class schedule and earned top grades in those classes.

When she first took the Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) in 10th grade, she passed English but failed math. Significantly, she said the exam questions didn't look anything like what she learned in class. By spring in her senior year, Green had failed the math exam four times and was making her fifth attempt to pass. By that time, she had taken Algebra I, earning a C, and Algebra II, earning an A. The only warning sign was her score of only 11 on the ACT, which put her behind 99 percent of other high school students who took the test nationally.

A week before graduation, Green found she hadn't passed again. She couldn't graduate, she couldn't be valedictorian, and she had to spend six weeks in summer school studying for a retest. At least 30 other students also had the grades to graduate but couldn't pass the exit exam.

"We were devastated," Alexander told *The Times-Picayune*. As she pointed out, "As and Bs do not indicate failure. How were we to know that anything was wrong, that she wasn't going to pass this test?"

Testing

Although critics of high-stakes testing pointed to the test as setting a standard the school couldn't yet meet, the editors of *The Times-Picayune* didn't see it that way. They viewed Green's case as an example of poor instruction, grade inflation, and cruelty.

"How cruel it is to give a student As and Bs and name her valedictorian when she's that far behind the rest of the nation," they wrote. "How cruel it is to her classmates with lower grades who've been tricked into thinking they've received an education, when they, too, have been cheated."

In most places, the editors pointed out, getting an A in Algebra II indicates mastery in factoring polynomials, solving quadratic equations, and solving complex word problems. Since Green obviously hadn't mastered those skills, her teachers "failed her by giving her glowing grades."

"The teachers and administrators at Fortier High have some explaining to do," concluded the editors. "If the senior with the best grades can't pass a 10th-grade test, what, if anything, are students being taught?"

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. *His email address is* **clowes@heartland.org**.

How Tough Is Louisiana's Math Exit Exam?

Bridget Green's failure to graduate high school because she persistently failed to pass Louisiana's Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) prompted local test critic C.C. Campbell-Rock to imply the GEE was a tough test to pass.

"I wish our public officials and even [the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education] would take a second look at the test," the critic told *Times-Picayune* reporter Aesha Rasheed.

Blogger Kimberly Swygert at *Number 2 Pencil* did what Campbell-Rock suggested and took a look at the sample GEE test questions posted by the Louisiana Department of Education.

"This test is providing a massive wake-up call to a school system that inflates grades and doesn't provide its students with the educational skills they need to go on to college," she concludes in an August 13 post.

Swygert found Louisiana students don't need to meet the "Proficient" achievement level to pass the GEE, which would require a score of 70-84 percent. They didn't even need to reach the "Basic" achievement level, either, with a score of 45-69 percent. To pass the GEE, students need only reach the "Approaching Basic" achievement level, which requires a score of 35-44 percent.

How tough are the GEE math problems? In the sample questions provided by the state, students are required to:

- Sum up positive and negative numbers;
- Use simple geometry for proportional reasoning about triangles;
- Interpret a simple graph;
- Answer a question involving simple statistics;
- Show they have "in-depth understanding" that the area of a rectangle is height times width.

"And the valedictorian couldn't do *this*?" asks a bemused Swygert. "And critics are telling us to take another look at *this* exam?"

INTERNET INFO

Sample questions for Louisiana's 10th-grade Graduation Exit Examination are available at the Web site of the Louisiana Department of Education at **http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/PDFs/LaDpt10thGrde.pdf**
Kimberly Swygert's *Number 2 Pencil* blog is at **http://kimberlyswygert.com**.

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ACT SCORES		SAT SCORES				NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS TESTS: PERCENT SCORING AT OR ABOVE "PROFICIENT"					
ACT Average Composite (2003)	% of HS Grads Tested	% of HS Grads Tested	Mean Verbal (2003)	Mean Math (2003)	State	4th-Grade Reading (2002)	8th-Grade Reading (2002)	4th-Grade Math (2000)	8th-Grade Math (2000)	4th-Grade Writing (2002)	8th-Grade Writing (2002)
20.8	40	48	507	519	Nation	30	31	25	26	27	30
20.1	73	10	559	552	Alabama	22	21	14	16	15	20
21.1	32	55	518	518	Alaska	-	-	-	-	-	-
21.4	27	38	524	525	Arizona	22	23	17	21	15	20
20.3	73	6	564	554	Arkansas	26	27	13	14	19	19
21.5	15	54	499	519	California	21	20	15	18	23	23
20.1	100	27	551	553	Colorado	-	-	-	-	-	-
22.1	7	84	512	514	Connecticut	43	37	32	34	49	45
20.8	5	73	501	501	Delaware	35	33	-	-	35	35
20.5	41	61	498	498	Florida	27	29	-	-	33	32
19.8	22	66	493	491	Georgia	28	26	18	19	23	25
21.8	16	54	486	516	Hawaii	21	20	14	16	22	18
21.2	60	18	540	540	Idaho	32	34	21	27	22	29
20.2	100	11	583	596	Illinois	-	-	21	27	-	-
21.6	21	63	500	504	Indiana	33	32	31	31	26	26
22.0	66	5	586	597	Iowa	35	-	28	-	27	-
21.5	76	9	578	582	Kansas	34	38	30	34	21	32
20.2	73	13	554	552	Kentucky	30	32	17	21	27	25
19.6	80	8	563	559	Louisiana	20	22	14	12	14	18
22.5	7	70	503	501	Maine	35	38	25	32	32	36
20.7	12	68	509	515	Maryland	30	32	22	29	30	35
22.3	10	82	516	522	Massachusetts	47	39	33	32	44	42
21.3	69	11	564	576	Michigan	30	32	29	28	19	24
22.0	67	10	582	591	Minnesota	37	-	34	40	29	-
18.7	88	4	565	551	Mississippi	16	20	9	8	13	13
21.4	69	8	582	583	Missouri	32	33	23	22	22	27
21.7	52	26	538	543	Montana	36	37	25	37	22	29
21.7	73	8	573	578	Nebraska	34	36	24	31	27	32
21.3	34	36	510	517	Nevada	21	19	16	20	18	16
22.2	8	75	522	521	New Hampshire	-	-	-	-	-	-
21.2	6	85	501	515	New Jersey	-	-	-	-	-	-
19.9	62	14	548	540	New Mexico	21	20	12	13	18	18
22.3	15	82	496	510	New York	35	32	22	26	37	30
19.9	15	68	495	506	North Carolina	32	32	28	30	32	34
21.3	80	4	602	613	North Dakota	34	35	25	31	20	24
21.4	64	28	536	541	Ohio	34	35	26	31	28	38
20.5	69	8	569	562	Oklahoma	26	28	16	19	16	27
22.6	12	57	526	527	Oregon	31	37	23	32	22	33
21.5	8	73	500	502	Pennsylvania	34	35	-	-	29	32
21.7	6	74	502	504	Rhode Island	32	30	23	24	30	29
19.2	34	59	493	496	South Carolina	26	24	18	18	17	20
21.4	70	4	588	588	South Dakota	-	-	-	-	-	-
20.4	74	14	568	560	Tennessee	25	28	18	17	23	24
20.1	33	57	493	500	Texas	28	31	27	24	29	31
21.3	67	7	566	559	Utah	33	32	24	26	20	23
22.5	11	70	515	512	Vermont	39	40	29	32	32	41
20.6	12	71	514	510	Virginia	37	37	25	26	29	32
22.5	16	56	530	532	Washington	35	37	-	-	30	34
20.3	63	20	522	510	West Virginia	28	29	18	18	19	21
22.2	69	7	585	594	Wisconsin	-	-	-	-	-	-
21.4	62	11	548	549	Wyoming	31	31	25	25	23	28
17.5	30	77	484	474	Dist. of Columbia	10	10	6	6	11	10

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NAEP data are published by the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, located at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/state.asp.

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